

Attending: Gwen Montgomery, Morgan Evans, Mel Quale, Chris Christiansen, Loyd Briggs, Bob Bronson, Steve Thorson, Garth Taylor, Doug Hancey, Kelly Adams,

BLM staff: Joe Kraayenbrink, Dave Howell, Sky Buffat, Lynn Ballard, Karen Rice, Wendy Reynolds, Carol McCoy Brown, Phil Damon, Andy Payne, Rick VanderVoet

Idaho Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy (Rita Dixon, Zoologist, Idaho Conservation Data Center, IDFG): This is a new program through IDFG using funds appropriated by Congress for studying species of concern. There are several requirements from Congress:

1. Information about the distribution and abundance of species of wildlife, primarily those species of greatest conservation need.
2. Developing locations, habitats, and community types
3. Description of effects
4. Descriptions of conservation actions
5. Proposed plans for monitoring not only species of greatest need, but also our success of our implementation actions.
6. Descriptions of procedures to review the strategy.
7. Plans for coordinating the development, implementation, review, and revision of the strategy with federal, state, and local agencies, and Tribes.
8. Broad public participation

Guiding principles include:

- Planning Processes and Partnerships: How do agencies coordinate and communicate with each other?
- Focus and scope: Should be based on good science, best management practices and adaptive management. Should also focus on broad ranges of habitats and species.
- Format and Content: Should be a useful document by as broad a range of an audience as possible. Should also make full use of relevant existing information, and determine how to fill knowledge gaps.
- Completion, Outcomes, and Availability:

Congress has required states to submit Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategies by October 1, 2005.

Questions/Concerns from RAC:

- Isn't this going to give someone out there ammunition for possible species listing. (That's not how it's intended – it's supposed to let us know whether the actions the

agencies take are having an effect, and as an early-warning system for species that need help.)

- Seems like a lot of the species' recommendations for listing can be very subjective. (We are using NatureServe's criteria to help take some of the subjectivity out of it, and help establish quantitative measures.)
- How much is being spent right now on strategy? (Mostly Rita's current time, and a couple of other people part time.)
- When will the draft strategy be available for us to take a look at? (Will probably be available in the spring. Public comments will also be taken then.)

Craters of the Moon NM EIS/Plan (Rick VanderVoet): We received about 150 comment letters plus about a thousand emails that originated through two advocacy group websites, which is pretty light in comparison to the number of comments and meetings we had at the beginning of the process. Some interest from the "gateway" communities of Arco, Carey and Rupert. There were some comments in the public meetings and workshops, as well as through the Draft EIS comment period, that allowed us to refine our thinking and modified our direction. One environmental group recommended a supplemental EIS and a no grazing alternative, as well as some other substantive comments. These and others received are being weighed and examined by specialists to see whether they have merit and should be changed in the Final EIS and Proposed Plan.

We also received some comments related to fire use in the Monument and the relationship to the FMDA process. Some of the comments suggested some changes to the alternatives, and the Preferred Alternative (Alt. D) will be tweaked a bit and incorporate some of the better points of Alternative C. The OHV community also weighed in on some suggestions for Travel Management. Also a few elements of Alternative B were considered, including better maintenance of the Carey-Kimama road. From public comments, the team is also considering some upgrades be made on the loop from American Falls, through King's Bowl and on to Minidoka. The Arco-Minidoka Road didn't generate much excitement, though there is some flexibility for future actions if the counties want to take it on.

Next steps: The interdisciplinary team is working now on responses to comments. The next step is to develop a proposed plan and final EIS. When the final is published, there will be a notice in the papers and the *Federal Register*, plus Governor's review. The Record of Decision and Final plan will be published after that. The final plan will be about a 50 page document that will guide management of the Monument for the next 15 years or so. Next ID Team meeting is September 23-24 in Arco at the Business Incubation Center.

Suggestion from RAC: If you can highlight the changes between now and the next meeting, we can be more prepared for the next discussion in November.

Field Office Reports:

Shoshone Field Office: Shoshone RMP Prep Plan is completed, though funding is not expected to start until FY 2006. // S&G's are on schedule. // Semptra Energy is discussing a coal-fired plant near King Hill, and they have given the new District Manager a briefing. They will be done scoping about the first of the year. The proposal is on private land, but surrounded by BLM. // Normal Year Fire Rehab Plan should be ready to go in the next few days. // Fire Management Plan for SCIIDC is ready to go to the state office in the next ten days, to be signed by FY year end. // Sage Grouse Working Groups: Trying to set up one group for the whole field office. We are also working with the state on the conservation plan. // Land Tenure Adjustments: We are dealing with a very large backlog. // Timber sale in Martin Canyon nearly complete. Potentially, there are two more stewardship projects up there. // 40,000 acres of burning and reseeding in cheatgrass areas completed.

Burley Field Office: Meeting Friday with the Fish & Wildlife Service on the Cotterel Project – we will be talking with them and other local agencies about the magnitude of developing a wind project. The Draft will be out the first part of 2005, with a new alternative, one which will include flexibility for a study to study raptor perch considerations. // City of Rocks/Castle Rocks: We have an interagency agreement with the Park Service and State Parks & Rec. We are working with the local managers on managing bolted climbing routes at the site. Look for a draft EA next spring. // Snails in the Snake River. There are five species on the endangered list, and all five occur in the Twin Falls District. The Fish & Wildlife Service is working on a biological opinion on the snails. The snails themselves are also moving upstream into Pocatello and Idaho Falls, so we are working on a strategy for dealing with environmental actions related to the river and the snails. We are also working with local interests, grazing permittees on how that may affect their operations and allotments.

Idaho Falls Field Office: Sagebrush Steppe Ecosystem Reserve released with DOE-Idaho last week. We have a meeting scheduled with them and other agencies in a few weeks to starting talking about how to do future management on this area. Available for downloading on the BLM website, www.id.blm.gov. // Emergency OHV Closure: a population of Ute Ladies Tresses orchid is being damaged by OHV use, and the area has been closed off to protect the species.

Pocatello Field Office: RMP on the way, and working toward a Draft EIS next year, with alternatives. Alternatives will include old management, one that is user friendly, one that is environmentally restrictive, and one that is somewhere in the middle. We also took advantage of no fires this year to put the fire crews to work on OHV inventory and needed projects.

Update on Sage Grouse Conservation Plan: The plan is on a fast track. The first draft was out for agency review last month, and a second draft will be out for public review at the end of October. The Idaho Plan will probably not be final until February, after the FWS comes out with their recommendation on listing. The local working groups are also working on their local plans, and the state plan will set the minimum standards for these conservation measures. BLM has also drafted a national strategy, and there's a lot of politics behind it; internal data calls seeking

information have also gone to USFWS for their consideration. The BLM strategy is only meant to be an interim step until the state plans are done.

Update on FMDA: Draft EIS is in Washington awaiting approval, and assuming we get the green light, we will have it ready to go in the next couple of months.

RAC Executive Session: Discussed briefly how to keep people interested in the RAC, and those experienced (outgoing) members involved. We will need to further discuss the question of whether/how we can use nominees not selected. For some of those people that were once on the RAC that are now not, but are still interested, please figure out a way to once-or-twice-a-year get some word out to them of what we are doing and how they can continue to participate. // We would like to pursue how to develop communication between the two RACs. Perhaps we can use the Yahoo bulletin board as a mechanism. // FS RAC – is there a mechanism to get them involved? (Yes, both formally and informally. There are joint RACs in existence for projects in other states. There are also project-level activities that they can come in for.)

Meeting adjourned at 5 p.m.

DAY 2: September 9, 2004

South Fork of the Snake River Float Trip: This day featured a day-long trip down the South Fork of the Snake River. The tour commenced at the Conant Boat Launch with a discussion of the visitor facilities and the Fee Demo Program. The boats launched and floated the “Canyon Section” of the South Fork, with stops at Pine Creek Camping Area #3, WorldCast’s outfitter site for lunch, and Lufkin Bottom. Discussions were informational only, covering impacts of recreation on the river system, omitted lands and BLM’s recreation program, noxious weed control, wildlife habitats, T&E Species, and interagency partnerships with the U.S. Forest Service, other federal, state and county agencies. Nice day on the river, weather perfect. Thanks to Idaho Falls Field Office and staff for their work on this tour.

ACTIONS: Dave, send RAC table to Rita for CWCS feedback and notes.
rdixon@idfg.state.id.us.

November meeting(s):

- RAC to make recommendations next meeting on Craters Preferred Alternative (revised).
- K Lynn to make presentation.
- Sage Grouse Draft Conservation Strategy presentation?
- New member orientation needed.